SOCIETY, POLITICS AND THEATRICALITY: REFORMATIVE AND REVOLUTIONARY STRUCTURES IN SELECT TRANSLATED PLAYS OF UTPAL DUTT, MAHASWETA DEVI AND MANOJ MITRA

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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WALIUL ALAM
(En. No. GD 3057)

UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

DR. VIBHA SHARMA
(ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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Major concern of the modern Indian theatrical literature and theatre is the demonstration of socio-political ambience, marginalization, oppression, poverty, hunger and corruption. A general consensus seems to have emerged that though the societal criticism, politics of power, oppression of marginal class, poverty, corruption and revolutionary and reformative zeal can be found in dramatic literature in earlier times, these specific aspects of modern Indian theatrical literature subsist in a more pronounced manner in the works of Utpal Dutt (1929-1993), Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) and Manoj Mitra (1938b). Utpal Dutt’s plays are predominantly concerned with revolutionary politics and revolution against the class enemy of the society. “Utpal Dutt’s purpose to use theatre as a political weapon is almost an article of faith with him. But it would be unfair because of that to deny his allegiance to what according to his informed lights he considers the basics of theatre” (Raha 162). However, Mahasweta Devi is a strongly dedicated social activist, who works among, with and for the oppressed and marginalized communities and her writings is a part of her socio-political programme of action. Poverty, hunger, oppression and corruption in the society move her to action and writing. “Profound humanism imbued with a deep-rooted love for the suffering humanity is the core of Devi’s philosophy” (Athista 627). And the massive body of Manoj Mitra’s plays generally deals with the socially, economically, culturally and educationally backward people. “He along with Utpal Dutt, Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, Bijon Bhattacharya and few more succeeds to enable the theatre frames to raise questions among people regarding social violence, injustice, and conflict” (SK 54). His plays are profoundly marked with dramatizing the politics of power of different factions of people in the society, typical social structure and social dilemmas of the lower and lower middle class society. “What is particularly refreshing is the absence of political bias and overt political messages in his plays imbued though they are with a progressive social outlook” (Raha 185).

Their major theatrical writing is devoted for the cause of underprivileged, marginalized, oppressed and the suppressed communities of the society. There is a great resemblance between the thematic concerns of the theatrical works of these three dramatists but
technique of portrayal may differ from one another. All the three playwrights dramatize the voice of the people who have been made voiceless in the society. They harshly criticize the feudalistic attitude and hypocrisies of the ruling classes, exploitative and abusive attitude of the ruling class, malicious social consuetude and traditions, and the oppression and discrimination of the common poor people. Their major plays dramatize the voice of the marginalized, oppressed and construct resistances against the monstrous social powers and forces. They wish to see a societal reformation and political revolution which would bring all the people from all the section of society on the same ground of humanity, equality, justice and fraternity.

This thesis endeavors to study the reformative and revolutionary zeal of these three versatile playwrights namely Utpal Dutt, Mahasweta Devi and Manoj Mitra with special emphasis on society and politics. It also showcases on the aspect of societal, political and theatrical elements in the theatre in Bengal while focusing on the works of these three playwrights. Although the theatrical literature of modern Indian theatre has attracted substantial critical attention, yet it has not been approached exclusively in terms of society and politics on the works of Utpal Dutt, Mahasweta Devi and Manoj Mitra as attempted by this thesis.

The first chapter of the thesis, Introduction deals with the various landscapes that these three playwrights came across and their impact on the growth of their artistic and theatrical sensibility. The impact of their family and surroundings on the growth of their sensitivity has been discussed. It also gives a detailed account of the theatrical journey of these three playwrights. This chapter also analyzes the key terms of the thesis namely society, politics and theatricality in the context of theatrical works and activities. The second chapter, Literature Review discusses the various dimensions and thematic variations of theatrical literature of Bengal from its advent to till date. This chapter also provides thematic and technical development of Bengal theatre and Bengali dramatic literature in an argumentative manner. The third chapter, Theatre, Theatricality and its Development in Bengal Theatre, discusses about the technical developments and innovations of Bengal theatre from its origin to till date. This chapter incorporates all the technical aspects of Bengal theatre such as stage, costume, design, makeup etc. and how
it eventually developed in the course of time. The fourth chapter, which bears the title, *Dialectics of Ideology and its Reformation in Bengal Social Structure*, scrutinizes the detailed component of social reformative zeal of these three playwrights in their respective dramatic works. This chapter also showcases the conflicts between the people of different ideologies and its impact on the society; and these playwrights’ attempt to bring reformation through producing their dramatic literature. *Politics of Power and Revolution for Change* is the title of the fifth chapter of the thesis, which demonstrates the nasty tricks of the powerful classes over the marginal class to retain dominance over the common masses. This chapter also exhibits the foul politics of different factions of ruling class and the miserable conditions of the commoners. These specific issues have been analyzed in this particular chapter in the light of the dramatic works of these three playwrights and their fervor for revolution to change the prevailing power structures in the society. Chapter sixth provides the conclusions reached on after the preceding chapters.

**Significance of the Study**

Relying upon the findings of the research, which were presented above, this study, is significant in these senses: Firstly, to extensively survey the literary and performance texts in order to create a quantum of ideas and trends among the three playwrights. Secondly, to bring out the nuances of the texts and highlight the issues they have dealt with in their works. Thirdly, to explain and exhibit reformative and revolutionary structures in these playwrights in terms of the depiction of the society and politics. Fourthly, to theorize the societal, political and theatrical elements in the theatre in Bengal while focusing on the works of the three playwrights.

**Limitations, Suggestions and Recommendations**

The present study discusses about the social reformative and revolutionary zeal of three playwrights: Utpal Dutt, Mahasweta Devi and Manoj Mitra. It also brings out the nuances of the texts and emphasizes the issues they have dealt with in their dramatic works. Regardless of the discussed issues and the mentioned conclusions and significances, the study bears these limitations: Firstly, as all the works of these three playwrights are
basically Bengali, I had to consult materials in Bengali language. Secondly, I faced lack of secondary materials on these playwrights as very few researches have been done on them. Thirdly, I had to translate many useful matters on them from Bengali into English.

On the basis of above limitations, these recommendations are provided for future studies: Firstly, these three playwrights are very much concerned about the contemporary issues of the society and that’s why they need to explore by the researchers. Secondly, their works are very contextual in terms of the present scenario of politics and society of India. Therefore, social reformatory and revolutionary messages of these playwrights need to bring out by the researchers. Thirdly, these playwrights are versatile playwrights and to do justice to their works it needs the attention of the researchers.
Works Cited

